The Scribes of the Scrolls

1. The different meanings of 'scribe'

The textual and material evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls bear witness to the compositional, editorial, and copying techniques of those who produced these scrolls. Scholars often call such producers of texts and scrolls 'scribes', and several studies have been devoted to Jewish scribes in the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Schams, 1998; Hezser, 2001; Norton 2009). Any general discussion of 'scribes' in this period is complex, in part because the English term has different meanings; in part because the meanings of Hebrew *sofer*, Aramaic *safar*, and Greek *grammateus*, all generally translated as 'scribe', developed and changed over time, and even differed between those languages. Thus, depending on text and context, a 'scribe' (*sofer/safar/grammateus*) could be an administrative official; a person who drafts and sometimes also physically writes records and documents; a person who composes or edits literary texts; a sage who studies and teaches wisdom and ancient literature; a scholar who studies torah and the legal interpretation of texts; or someone who copies existing texts by hand. For those reasons, many other terms referring to educated persons, such as 'sage', *mevin*, *maskil*, and perhaps also *moreh*, 'teacher', are largely synonymous to 'scribe' (Lange, 2008). Though we should distinguish different occupations, individual scribes may have been involved in multiple activities. A composer, editor, or student of texts may also have copied manuscripts by hand, in particular those very texts they composed or interpreted. This would particularly hold true for small closed scribal communities which studied, composed, and

copied texts, as has been argued for the assumed Qumran community. However, none of the preserved Dead Sea Scrolls directly applies the *sofer/safar* terminology in relation to contemporary scribal activities. We do not know how the producers of the Dead Sea texts and scrolls would have referred to their own literary text-producing activities.

2. Scribal figures in literature

Whereas the 'biblical' scribes Ezra and Baruch are virtually absent from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the term 'scribe' is used in connection to other biblical figures who are not called 'scribe' in the biblical books. Thus, in the *Book of Watchers* Enoch is called 'scribe of truth' (*1 En*och 12.4 and 15.1 – the Aramaic part is lost, but probably had *safar qušṭa*) and in the *Book of Giants*, 'scribe of explanation/distinction (?)' (*safar paraša*; 4Q203 8 4 and 4Q530 2 ii 14). Those references are not to Enoch as author or even copyist of books, but in *1 Enoch* 12-16 and 4Q203 8 to Enoch as the one who records the reproof of the Watchers (4Q203 8 refers explicitly to a 'document'). In the two *Book of Giants* passages, Enoch is called a *safar paraša* who can interpret dreams. Within this context of dream interpretation (*pšar*; both in 4Q530 2 ii and 4Q203 8), the phrase *safar paraša* might be taken to mean 'scribe of explanation'.

The *Aramaic Levi Document* (*ALD*) preserved in fragments from Qumran Cave 4, pages from the Cairo Genizah, and in rewritten form in the Greek *Testament of Levi* (*TestLevi*), contains an instruction on the teaching of wisdom (chapter 13 in the Greenfield-Stone-Eshel edition). Levi instructs his sons to teach their children 'literacy (*sfar*) and teaching of wisdom', mentions the social glory one attains through wisdom, and refers to his brother Joseph as an

example of such teaching. In this text, neither Levi, nor his children, nor Joseph, are termed scribes, but Josephus (*Apion* 1.290) calls Moses as well as Joseph scribes, and the latter even a *hierogrammateus* (here not a 'sacred, i.e. priestly, scribe' but a specialist of hieroglyphical writings). In *ALD* 13, literacy is connected with wisdom and with sages who attain positions at a court, and less likely with a Levitical ideal of priests who give instruction and judgment. In this respect, the description of *ALD* is very similar to that of the wise scribe in *Ahiqar*. In the *TestLevi* variant edition of *ALD* 13, the teaching of literacy (13.2 *grammata*) is secondarily connected with wisdom, and first with the reading and instruction of the law of God.

The section in 11Q5 27.2-11 dubbed 'David's Compositions' describes David as 'wise, shining like the sun, literate (*sofer*), discerning, and perfect in all his ways before God and men, to who God gave a discerning and enlightened spirit, so that he wrote psalms … all those he spoke through prophecy which was given to him from the Most High'. The description corresponds in part to the one of David in 2 Samuel 23, but in distinction refers to him as wise (or 'sage'), and 'literate' (or 'scribe'). Also, where David speaks an oracle according to 2 Samuel 23, in 11Q5 27 he writes (or 'composes') psalms and songs.

Another Second-Temple description of scribes, Sirach 38.24-39.11 on the wisdom of scribes, shares elements both with *ALD* such as teaching of wisdom and traveling through other lands, and with 11Q5, such as the spirit of understanding. However, at best indirectly (Sirach 39.8a) it refers to the production of texts.

3. *Scribal exemplars*

One assumes that literary descriptions of scribal figures such as Enoch, Levi, or David disclose how some Second-Temple scribes reflected on their own scribal activity. For Enoch, this holds true both for his claim of universal knowledge, and for his interpretative capacities, and it is striking that 'interpretation' turns up in similar terms in different scribal descriptions (see below §4 on the overseer). In the case of Levi and the Levites, the familial transmission of literacy and instruction of wisdom (and law) expresses the self-identification of Second-Temple priestly groups. The description of David which connects inspiration (prophecy) and the production of (liturgical) texts may have been exemplary for the self-understanding of Ben Sira and later scribes. However, none of the above (§2) mentioned texts was written with the movements generally connected with the Dead Sea scrolls collections. Probably therefore, these scribal exemplars only account for some of the many new compositions discovered near the Dead Sea.

A different kind of exemplar is the figure of the 'Teacher of Righteousness'. The broken commentary of 4Q171 on Ps 45.2 ('my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe') refers to the 'answer of the tongue' of the elusive Teacher of Righteousness, an expression also used by the first person of the Hodayot (e.g., 4.29; 8.24; 10.9). The teacher is not portrayed as a writing scribe, but as enlightened by spirit, enabling him to interpret prophecy and to find the proper words of praise. Thus, the term 'voice of the Teacher' (CD 20.28, 32) characterizes the mode of the Hodayot and the Pesharim and perhaps other new works (García Martínez, 2010, pp. 28-36). These anonymous texts appeal implicitly, and the Habakkuk pesher explicitly, to the teacher figure who encapsulates multiple scribal functions, like instruction, interpretation of

scripture, and the formulation of words of praise. The composers of these texts apparently did not seek, like the Levites or Ben Sira, their own glory, memory, or an eternal name, but effaced themselves. Though clearly literate, they made no such claims, and except perhaps for some of the Hodayot there is no trace of individual authorship.

4. Scribal functions within the Dead Sea Scrolls communities

Whereas 'scribe' terms refer primarily to the intellectual activities involved in reading and writing, the physical act of writing, involved in the production of documents, or the copying of texts, is expressed by 'writing' (*katab*). The *Damascus Document* and the *Rule of the Community*, assign the task of keeping records of the property or violations of members to the so-called overseer. One such document seems to be 4Q477 (*Rebukes Reported by the Overseer*). In fact, the so-called 'Rule for the overseer of a camp ' in CD 13 lists many tasks which would require the kind of expertise which is elsewhere ascribed to scribes, including the teaching of the explanation of the law, and the recounting of eternal events together with their interpretation. It is hard to decide whether 4Q477 presents the original document written by an overseer, and it has not yet been determined whether the same scribal hand is found in other manuscripts. Other leadership functions mentioned in the Qumran rule texts, like that of the *maskil*, are not directly connected to the act of writing, but rather with teaching or instruction (Hempel, 2013, pp. 162-171). Yet, the repeated connection between scrolls compositions and the *maskil,* establishes the *maskil*, and in a sense the described community as a whole, as literate (see also below §9).

5. *Writers of manuscripts*

It is unknown to what extent there was a differentiation between those who composed or edited texts, and those who actually wrote them down and copied them. Likewise, we generally are ignorant of the reason why persons actually wrote or copied specific texts and for whom they did so. Comparative data from the Hellenistic and Roman world suggest many different possibilities, ranging from authors of texts copying their own texts for friends or to create an audience, from readers borrowing manuscripts and copying texts for themselves or others, professional scribes of different proficiency copying texts on their own or in ateliers, to students writing or copying texts as part of their education. Texts could be read out loud (by a teacher, or a reader in a workshop) and written down simultaneously by multiple copyists, or copied visually from one or more so-called *Vorlage*. Stegemann (1998, pp. 51-55) argued that Qumran would have been a production centre of scrolls for the entire Essene movement. The limited physical research on the ink of the manuscripts indicates that some manuscripts were not copied in the Dead Sea region (1QapGen) while others (1QHodayot^{a}) were. If we disregard a few outliers, the scrolls were written during a period of almost two centuries. From a scribal perspective, therefore, the collection is hardly homogeneous.

By carefully comparing texts and manuscripts, we may gain some insight in the varieties of producing texts and perhaps also differences between scribes. Some manuscripts show copyists to have copied quite literally their *Vorlages*, up to the specific spelling of words. Other manuscripts display a wide range of textual as well as literary variance between

manuscripts that preserve the same or a similar text. Such literary variance attests to ongoing scribal compositional and editorial activity, which, however, cannot automatically be attributed to the actual copyist of the manuscript. In fact, many of the works of which we have multiple copies from the Judean Desert are attested in varying literary forms, characterized by textual recensions (as in the case of 1QS 5 versus 4Q258 1), or by variant arrangements and collections of units. While scholars have looked at textual and literary variance within specific compositions or genres, there are very few studies that have tried to correlate variance to specific scribes or to particular scribal practices.

6. Scribal practices

Tov (2004) provides an almost comprehensive overview of scribal practices attested in the manuscripts from the Judean Desert. Thus, he lists characteristic features of individual scribes; identification of scribal hands; the use of different languages, scripts and writing materials; the dimensions of sheets; the ruling of lines on sheets, with or without guide dots; the form of writing blocks, and the size of columns and margins; conventions used at the beginnings and ends of scrolls; the use of divisions between words, small sense units, sections, poetical units, and books; scribal marks and procedures usually in the margins; special forms of writing of divine names; different correction procedures and, more generally, the degree of scribal intervention. Such features are important for comparative research: there are differences and correspondences with writing practices in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, as well as with the Rabbinic practices described in the talmudic tractate *Soferim*. Knowledge of scribal practices

is crucial for the interpretation of fragmented material. For example, scrolls with a small column height of ten or less lines usually have a limited number of columns. Thus, one may surmise from the few fragments of 4Q116 (4QDan^{e}), which indicate a column height of nine lines, that this manuscript with remnants of Daniel 9 could not have contained the entire biblical book of Daniel. Likewise, 4Q510 would not have included all the songs attested in 4Q511.

However, it is especially the correlation between different sets of data that sheds light on more general scribal practices and sometimes helps to differentiate and perhaps even identify (groups of) scribes. Some correlations between writing material and contents are well known: virtually no copies of books that later became part of the Hebrew Bible were written on papyrus, whereas the collection of papyrus manuscripts contains many liturgical texts. Other correlations pertain to language and script: the paleo-Hebrew and cryptic A scripts are only used for Hebrew texts. Or, to genre and format, such as is the case with most *pesharim* (Brooke, 2010). Scholars have hypothesized that the scribes of the Pentateuchal manuscripts written in paleo-Hebrew script were most likely Sadducean (most recently: Delamarter, 2010). Idiosyncratic scribal practices, such as the dicolon at the end of verses in 4Q156, may suggest a provenance different from other scrolls. Yet, the highly fragmentary and varied material, and the paucity of reliable data, ask for caution as well as for a comprehensive approach. For example, the Sadducean hypothesis does not really explain the paleo-Hebrew manuscript of Job or touch upon the few other paleo-Hebrew manuscripts, while a Samaritan connection

has rarely been considered. Or, even apart from the dicolon, 4Q156 as the single Aramaic translation of a Pentateuchal book, is unique.

7. The hypothesis of a 'Qumran scribal practice'

The most far-reaching correlation has been argued for by Tov (2004), who constructs an idiosyncratic scribal practice, reflected in orthography, morphology, and scribal features, and which is found in virtually all copies of texts which were generally called sectarian. Some elements of this scribal practice are: a consistently full spelling using the *waw* for /o/ and /u/; the preference for so-called 'pausal' forms of the *qal* imperfect, such as *yiqṭolu*; the frequent lengthening of some pronominal suffixes, the second person plural perfect forms, third person singular independent pronouns, and soms adverbially used nouns and particles; writing the tetragrammaton and other words for God in paleo-Hebrew letters or expressing them by dots; the use of cancellations dots (and sometimes crossing out with lines) as the preferred correction procedure. The correspondence between 'Qumran' and this scribal practice seems statistically significant, but is not exclusive: a few manuscripts (e.g., 4Q109), apparently to be dated before the settlement of Qumran, already display this practice, whereas a handful of broadly acknowledged 'sectarian' texts, such as two of the *pesharim* (4Q162 and 4Q169) and one of the copies of the *Rule of the Community* (4Q258), do not reflect this practice. Overall, Tov interprets the evidence to indicate that in general the scribes writing at Qumran used a specific scribal practice.

As with all statistical research, the problem here lies in the analysis of the data (Tigchelaar, 2010). Tov correctly points at many correlations, but some are strong and some are weaker. For example, virtually all manuscripts (including the 'biblical' ones) that use paleo-Hebrew letters for divine names have a full orthography. On the other hand, the use of cancellation dots hardly seems a characteristic correlated to other 'Qumran scribal practice' features. Specific features do seem to be clustered in a group of texts, but many manuscripts do not fit neatly within a binary categorization of 'Qumran scribal practice' and a non-'Qumran scribal practice'. More importantly, the correlation of these features with a 'sectarian' group of texts or scribes overlooks other possibilities, such as the genre or function of texts, or dialectal features which influenced some scribes or texts more than others.

8. Paleography and Scribes

Paleography as the study of ancient handwriting aims at describing and deciphering ancient writings, but also at classifying scribal hands (typologically, geographically, or chronologically), and at identifying the handwriting of individual scribes. Some manuscripts are written in unique or unusual hands (e.g. 4Q259) suggesting individual ideosyncracy or a different geographical provenance of the scribe. Many other manuscripts display rather similar hands. For example, the manuscripts written in so-called bookhands, by their very nature of a standardized form tend to look alike. Close similarity holds true for several manuscripts written in the hand of the scribe of 1QS (who is commonly thought to have copied also 1QSa, 1QSb, 4Q53, 4Q175, and plausibly 4Q443, and to have corrected 1QIsa^{a}).

Recently, Yardeni proposed that at least thirty-six manuscripts written in a type of hand traditionally called 'round' or 'rustic' 'semiformal Herodian', should be attributed, in spite of graphic differences between the writing in the manuscripts, to one individual scribe, active in Qumran in the late first century B.C.E. (2007). Identification of multiple manuscripts copied by specific scribes would greatly add to our knowledge of scribes and copyists. However, such identifications are subjective given the present lack of a theoretical framework and methodological approach which assesses the significance of both graphic correspondences and graphic differences for the identification of individual scribes. 4Q175 is written with considerably less care than 1QS, which might account for the different graphic appearance of details of letters and the overall writing. Yet, the many shared idiosyncratic features on phonological and morphological level that suggest an influence of the Aramaic on this particular scribe, strengthens the identification (Tigchelaar, 2003). Hitherto, Yardeni's claim of one specific scribe seems overly optimistic and is in need of objectification. Whereas a subtype of the listed manuscripts displays remarkable correlations, such as the nonfinal use of *pe, tsade* and *kap* in final position, overall there is a large variety in letterforms other than *lamed* and *alep* and in morphology. In the case of the first hand of 1QpHab and that of 11Q20, the graphic correspondence is very close, while these two manuscripts alone share the typical crosses at the end of the line, which features combined strongly suggest one and the same scribe. This would indicate that the crosses in the Habakkuk pesher are not related to the genre of 1QpHab, but to the scribal practice of a specific scribe.

9. Schools and Education

There is ample evidence of writing at the site of Qumran, ranging from excavated ink-wells at the so-called scriptorium, the discovery of multiple ostraca, including two abecedaries, and the enigmatic piece of furniture generally interpreted as a writing bench. Theories about a school or other scribal education at Qumran are more speculative, based on the presence of scrolls in the Caves, assumptions about their origin, and suppositions about the nature of the settlement in relation to the communities described in the scrolls. Thus, Lemaire (2006) refers to *4QInstruction*, the *Damascus Document*, the *Rule of the Congregation*, and the role of the *maskil*, in his discussion of education at Qumran. Naturally, those who composed and copied the scrolls must have been educated as scribes, whether at Qumran or elsewhere. However, the concrete evidence for this education is limited.

Milik proposed that a manuscript like 4Q201 'is perhaps a school-exercise, copied by a young scribe from the master's dictation' (1976, p. 141), but the ancient date and special handwriting of the copy indicates it was not copied at Qumran. Scholars have suggested Northern Syrian or Galilean influence on script or orthography. Another scribal exercise may be 4Q6, apparently a single sheet of mediocre leather, starting with Gen 48:1 with uneven writing. 4Q234, 4Q341, and 4Q360 are all either writing exercises (4Q341) or scraps for trying out one's pen (4Q234 and 4Q360, the latter possibly by a scribe called Menahem). The presence of such scraps with writing exercises among the other scrolls of Qumran Cave 4 needs to be taken into account in any hypothesis about the collections in the caves.

Shared scribal features indicate a shared scribal culture transmitted through schools, education, or close contact. However, in spite of commonalities between copies of texts generally deemed sectarian, the scribal features of the manuscripts themselves do not indicate a common provenance or a specific scribal school. Rather, the collection as a whole, as described in many details by Tov, exhibits at the same time a large variety of manuscripts with different scribal practices, and a cluster of texts that reveal more conformity, and may reflect the scribal culture of its period.

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